Buddhism as an Education

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Chapter 1: The Cause of Our Chaotic World

Today's societies in Taiwan and elsewhere in the world are rather abnormal, a phenomenon that has not been witnessed before either in the West or the East. Some Westerners have predicted that the end of the world will occur in 1999 and that Christ will return to earth for Judgement Day. Easterners have also predicted impending disasters that are similar to those predictions in the West, the only difference being the time frame, which is some twenty years later. Some of these are ancient prophecies, which we should not place too much importance on. However, if we view our environment objectively, we will realize that this world is really in danger.

Environmental pollution has become a serious problem and now humankind has finally begun to understand the need for protecting our environment. However, the problem of mental or spiritual pollution is many times more serious than that of the environment. This is the source of worldly ills that not many people realize. The Chinese have a saying, "Education is most essential to establish a nation, train its leaders and its people." For centuries, the Chinese have always believed in the primacy of education, which is considered the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous society. It provides the solution to a myriad of social ills and leads the way to changing one's suffering into happiness. Education has a strong impact on the nation and its people. Moreover, elementary school is the foundation, the basic building block in an educational system.

Chapter 2: Buddhism as an Education

Buddhism officially came to China in 67 AD. The Emperor had sent special envoys to India to invite Buddhist monks to

come to China to teach Buddhism, which in that period, was regarded as an educational system, and not as a religion. Regretfully, about two hundred years ago, the practice of Buddhism had taken on a more religious facade. Therefore, the purpose of this talk is to correct this misunderstanding, by leading us back to the original form of Buddhism as taught by Buddha Shakyamuni.

The Goal of the Buddha’s Teaching

Buddhism is Buddha Shakyamuni’s educational system, which is similar to that of Confucius for both presented similar viewpoints and methods. The goal of Buddhist education is to attain wisdom. In Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, the Buddhist wisdom was called “Anuttara-samyak-sambhodi” meaning the perfect ultimate wisdom. The Buddha taught us that the main objective of our practice or cultivation was to achieve this ultimate wisdom. He further taught us that everyone has the potential to realize this state of ultimate wisdom, as it is an intrinsic part of our nature, not something one obtains externally. However, most of us have become confused through general misconceptions and therefore, are not able to realize this potential. Therefore, if we break through this confusion, we will realize this intrinsic part of our nature. Thus, Buddhism is an educational system aimed at regaining our own intrinsic nature. It also teaches absolute equality which stemmed from Buddha's recognition that all sentient beings possess this innate wisdom and nature. Therefore, there is no inherent difference among beings. Everyone is different now because we have lost our true nature and have become confused. The degree of wisdom exhibited by individuals depends on the degree of delusion and has nothing to do with the true nature of the individual. The Buddha’s teaching helps us to realize that innate, perfect, ultimate wisdom. With wisdom, we can then solve all our problems and turn suffering into happiness. Due to our lack of

wisdom, we perceive, view and behave foolishly, and thus suffer the consequences evoked by our incorrect actions. If we have wisdom, our thoughts, viewpoints and behavior will be correct; how then can we suffer when there are no ill consequences to suffer from? Of course, we will be happy. From here, we can see that suffering is caused by delusion and the source of happiness is our own realization of wisdom.

The Core of the Buddha's Teaching

The Buddha's teaching contains three major points: discipline, meditation and wisdom. Wisdom is the goal and deep meditation or concentration is the crucial process toward achieving wisdom. Discipline through observing the precepts, is the method that helps one to achieve deep meditation; wisdom will then be realized naturally. Buddha's entire teachings as conveyed in the sutras never really depart from these three points. Buddhism encompasses the entire collection of works by Buddha Shakyamuni and is called the Tripitaka. This can be classified into three categories: sutra, vinaya (precepts or rules), and sastra (commentaries) which emphasize meditation, discipline, and wisdom respectively.

The Buddhist Educational Organization in China

Buddhist education is based on filial piety, as is the Chinese culture. Prior to the introduction of Buddhism to China, filial piety was the pillar of society and was supported by the wise men of ancient China. When Buddhist monks from India came to China and started to discuss Buddhism with government officials, it was immediately apparent to everyone that Buddhism shared numerous similarities with the indigenous Confucian traditions. Consequently, the government embraced them and requested that the monks stay in China permanently.

The first two monks, who came to China, Moton and Chufarlan, were received by the "Hong-Lu-Si” which is

equivalent to our present Foreign Ministry or State Department. "Si" was designated as a ministry of the government. The Chief of Hong-Lu-Si is equivalent to a foreign minister or Secretary of State. However, Hong-Lu-Si could only receive foreign guests temporarily. In order to allow them to stay permanently, the Emperor added another ministry, "Bai-Ma-Si," to take charge of Buddhist education. Originally, the "Si" had nothing to do with a temple, but merely denoted a ministry of the imperial court, now it denotes a temple in contemporary Chinese. So, there were two ministries in charge of education. The "Li-Bu," managed by the Prime Minister, was in charge of the traditional Confucian educational system. This organization served the same function until the early 1900's. As the Emperor had given enormous support to the "Bai-Ma-Si," Buddhist education rapidly spread throughout China. In many instances, it had even far exceeded the efforts to educate people than the traditional education system of "Li-Bu." Consequently, there may not have been a Confucian or Manfucian school in every village, but there was a "Si" everywhere. Again, the Buddhist "Si", or temple, used to be an educational institution and did not perform religious ceremonies at all, unlike what often takes place in contemporary temples nowadays.

Another important mission for the original "Si" was sutra translation. The scale of the translation effort is hard to imagine today. During the seventh century, the famous monk Xuan-Tsuang had supervised six hundred scholars in sutra translation. Prior to this, a monk named Kumaraja had a translation team of about four hundred scholars. Therefore, the "Si" was a large governmental organization. Unfortunately, it was completely transformed into a place to deal with superstition and spirits around two hundred years ago. Its educational characteristics totally disappeared, which was truly regretful.

The Four Current Types of Buddhism

Today, there are four types of Buddhism being practiced. First, there is the religious Buddhism, which can be witnessed in temples throughout Taiwan. However, this does not represent the real Buddhism. Second, there is the academic Buddhism being taught in many universities today, where we see Buddhism being treated purely as philosophy, an academic pursuit, especially in Japan. This is not exactly Buddha's education either. Third, and the most unfortunate of all, is the total degeneration of Buddhism into a cult. This third type of Buddhism is much more damaging to the public than the first two types. Finally, there is the traditional Buddhism, the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni in its true essence, which is very rare in our day and age.

Chapter 3: The Author's Own Experience with Buddhism

When I was a young student in Nanjing, I did not believe in any religion. I went to church with some classmates to learn about Christianity. Although I tried to understand it, I could not find a way to accept it. My favorite religion at that time was Islam because its emphasis was on moral principles and ethics, and I thought that this was rare among religions. When I encountered Buddhism back then, the monks were not very convincing. Therefore, I could not accept Buddhism either and it was the one I resisted the most. I was too young at that time and had not met a true practitioner.

After I arrived in Taiwan, I heard of Professor Dong-Mei Fang, who was then a famous philosopher and a professor at the National Taiwan University. Having become an admirer of his, I wrote him a letter asking about taking a class from him at the university. Professor Fang was only in his forties at that time. He

invited me to his house and told me, “Nowadays in school, professors do not act like professors, and students do not act like students either. If you come to the university and expect to learn something, you will be sorely disappointed.” When I heard this, I was pretty upset since he had basically poured cold water over my plans. Finally, he told me: “Well, why don't you come to my house every Sunday, and I will give you personal instruction for two hours.” I could not believe that he was so compassionate towards me. I learned about philosophies at Professor Fang’s small table in his little living room, one on one. This was extremely precious to me. He introduced the philosophies of the West, China, India and finally Buddhism. He taught me that Buddhism is the pinnacle of the world's philosophy and that it provides the greatest enjoyment for humanity. What he told me was fascinating and soon I realized that Buddhism contained something magnificent. I started to visit the temples in Taipei. However, the monks I met in those temples just could not clearly explain Buddhism to an intellectual skeptic like me. However, the monks are much better in teaching Buddhism today. Then I set my first sight on Shan-Dao-Si, which was a large temple in Taipei with a vast collection of sutras. During that period of time, the wide publication and circulation of Buddhist books was very rare. The monks at Shan-Dao-Si were extremely kind to me as they allowed me to borrow many of the precious and rare sutras. This was a great help to me.

Soon after I started to learn Buddhism seriously, I was fortunate to meet Master Zhang-Jia. He was a well-accomplished Esoteric practitioner who taught and guided me in my study and practice. Just like Mr. Fang, he taught me two hours every week for three years until he passed away. I then went to Taizhong to follow Mr. Bing-Nan Lee and started studying and practicing with him.

Buddhism is a special kind of knowledge; it is not a religion. In order to derive true benefit from it, we have to

understand it's true nature. I have the utmost respect for Buddhism and I believe Buddha Shakyamuni to be the foremost educator in the history of the world. He was just like Confucius in that he taught everyone tirelessly and without discrimination.

Chapter 4: The Methodology and Symbolism of the Buddhist Educational System

The Continuing Education System for Teachers

The continuing education system for teachers was first established by Buddha Shakyamuni. Many of his students were well accomplished under his instruction. Every year, these students were assigned to teach at different places for nine months. In India, the rainy season runs from mid-April to mid-July. Since it was inconvenient to travel and teach during those three months, all the students would come back to meet with the Buddha to receive additional teachings and to learn from each other in class discussions. This was called the summer retreat and it parallels what is currently known as continuing education for teachers. The modern continuing educational system is necessitated by the advancement in technology. However, twenty-five hundred years ago, Buddha had already adopted this idea in bringing his students back for additional teachings.

The Artful Buddhist Teaching

Buddhist teaching is full of artistic expressions. It was originally an education, which combined what was equivalent to today's museum and school system. Therefore, the "Si" combined the traditional school, library and museum. In ancient China, the traditional school system was not universal. Most students went to a "Si" to study because it usually had a complete collection of books, similar to today's library. The

collections included not only sutras, but also almost every kind of publication. The monks were familiar with Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and ancient Chinese texts. They were capable of answering questions and were well versed on various subjects. Consequently, Buddhist institutions began to take over the educational mission for China.

Typical Buddhist buildings are expressions of art, which are called "Expressions of Buddhism." However, Buddha and Bodhisattva statues do not represent polytheism, the worship of more than one god. Each statue serves to inspire wisdom and awakening in each of us. They also represent certain aspects of Buddhism, which remind practitioners of the particular topic of teaching. For example, Guan Yin Bodhisattva, the most popular Bodhisattva in China, represents Infinite Compassion. When we see this statue, it reminds us to apply compassion when dealing with the world, its people and surroundings. However, people nowadays worship Guan Yin Bodhisattva as a god and pray for the relief of suffering and to eliminate obstacles. This is a superstitious view and misconception because people forget the fact that the statues are expressions of concepts in Buddhism.

Buddhist architecture is also an artistic expression, with the temple's main cultivation hall being similar to a large meeting or teaching hall. From the exterior, it appears to have two stories, but there is only one story inside. The external two stories represent "absolute truth" or the true reality of life and the universe, and "relative truth" or worldly views still clouded with delusion. The interior single story illustrates that both are the same truth. To the deluded, the two appear distinct and different; however, to the enlightened, they are one and the same.

In the center of the main cultivation hall, there are three statues, one Buddha and two Bodhisattvas. Buddha represents the true nature of the universe and human life, which is called "Buddha nature" or true mind. "Buddha" is translated from Sanskrit, and means someone who is totally enlightened. The

Buddha statue represents our original enlightenment and the Bodhisattvas statues represent the application of our original enlightened mind. All the representations and applications are infinite and can be classified into two categories: wisdom and practice. For example, the Pure Land School pays respect to the Buddha and two Bodhisattvas of the Western Paradise. Amitabha Buddha (Infinite Life and Infinite Light) represents the infinite enlightenment that is an intrinsic part of our nature. Bodhisattvas Guan Yin (Avalokiteshvara) and Da Shi Zhi (Great Strength or Mahasthamaprapta) respectively portray compassion with kindness and great wisdom. We should be compassionate and kind toward all beings. Our thoughts, views and behavior should be rational rather than emotional, for emotional behavior spells trouble. Therefore, we should not treat the Buddha and Bodhisattvas as gods. But will they help us? Yes, they will by providing us with the knowledge of how to protect ourselves from delusion, thereby obtaining release from suffering. Once we have learned the background of the artistic components in Buddhist architecture, music and statues, we will gain an enriched experience when paying a visit to a traditional Buddhist temple.

However, nowadays many people do not understand the meaning and teachings of Buddhism. They mistake the multi-representations of Bodhisattvas as a sign of polytheism. What people fail to understand is the fact that the statues in Buddhism are teaching aids and not statues of gods. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas represent our nature and cultivation of virtue. We have infinite capabilities within our true nature that cannot be expressed by just one single term. Therefore, we have multiple representations; for instance, a capable person today may have many titles on his/her business cards to show his/her positions and accomplishments. The Buddha and Bodhisattvas are actually representations of the nature within ourselves: Buddha, as in our true nature of mind, and the Bodhisattvas, in our virtue of

cultivation. We all possess these qualities. Not until we come to realize the meaning of Buddhist symbolism, will we appreciate the sophistication and completeness of its education.

Typical "Si" buildings are rare today. The first hall of a "Si" is the hall of Heavenly Guardians, also known as Dharma Protectors. Situated in the center of the hall, facing the front door, is Mi Le Pu Sa (Maitreya Bodhisattva) who is represented by the image of the historical monk Bu-Dai. Mi Le Pu Sa has a big smile that conveys the idea that in order to truly learn Buddhism, one should learn to be cheerful and courteous to all. He also has a huge belly that represents fairness, flexibility, impartiality, patience and tolerance.

Standing beside Mi Le Pu Sa are the four Heavenly Guardians or Dharma Protectors. They are symbolic guardians of the practitioners of the Buddhist way. Whom do they protect? They protect us by reminding us to educate ourselves and to safeguard the proper knowledge, which we should learn. Each guardian portrays a different aspect of thought or action.

The Eastern Dharma Protector (holding a lute) symbolizes responsibility and safeguards the territory, which means that all of us are responsible for ourselves, our family, society and the country as a whole. If each of us performs our duties well, fulfilling our obligations, we support each other and ourselves as well. The Southern Dharma Protector (holding a sword) symbolizes progress and teaches us diligence. He emphasizes the importance of constantly cultivating and advancing our virtue, wisdom and knowledge, and to improve performance in ourselves and our duties. This is similar to Confucian ideas of daily self-improvement.

The Western Dharma Protector (holding a dragon or snake) symbolizes comprehensive vision and knowledge gained through exposure to the world. He represents the need to open our eyes to observe nature and man, to refine what we see and learn, and to distinguish good from ill. The Northern Dharma Protector

(holding an umbrella) symbolizes comprehensive study and learning. Both teach ways of practice and how to achieve the goals in responsibility fulfillment and self-improvement. As the ancient Chinese have said: “To read ten thousand books and to travel ten-thousand miles.” We read to gain more knowledge and travel to observe more effectively. We will then be able to improve ourselves and to perform our duties most effectively.

Today, people visit the Hall of Dharma Protectors to burn incense, prostrate and offer flowers and fruit praying for protection and safety. This is superstition. All the facilities, images of Buddha and Bodhisattvas and any offerings made are teaching tools designed to inspire our mind and wisdom. They also serve to remind us of the importance of being enlightened instead of deluded, virtuous instead of deviated, pure instead of polluted. These are the three principles of Buddhist teaching and practice.

Methods of Practicing Buddhism

The ways in practicing Buddhism are numerous, about eighty-four thousand. Each path is different from the others but ultimately leads to the same goals: enlightenment, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity. As such, all paths are equal without one being superior to the other. People have different abilities and levels of accomplishment. Furthermore, they are from different environments and should choose a path most suited to them. We can choose any one of the three goals to concentrate our practice on. When we achieve any one of them, the other two will come naturally.

There are ten schools of practice in Chinese Buddhism. Zen stresses the pursuit of the perfect clear mind or enlightenment. The Pure Land and Tibetan Buddhism or Vajrayana school stress obtaining the pure mind. Other schools concentrate their practice on proper thoughts and viewpoints. Regardless of which method or school one chooses, they all lead to the same outcome. In

other words, once we become expert in one method, we will become an expert in all methods.

The purity of the world comes from an individual's inner purity. With a pure mind, a mind without discrimination or attachment, a higher level of wisdom arises in which the world around us naturally comes into harmony. By reciting the Buddha's name, meditating, reciting sutras or mantras, and practicing in accordance with Buddha's teaching, one will attain enlightenment, proper thoughts and viewpoints, and purity of mind thus becoming void of all deluded thoughts.

On the other hand, one is totally on the wrong path if one chants Buddha's name in the hope of gaining a promotion or wealth. That is religion and superstition, and it goes against the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha.

How Buddhist Terminology Illustrate that Buddhism is an Education

Buddhism is the teaching of Buddha Shakyamuni as he was its founder. We call Him the "Original teacher," just like the Chinese call Confucius the "Greatest sage and teacher." The relationship between Buddha and ourselves is a teacher-student relationship, which is not religious in nature. In religion, there is not a teacher-student relationship but that of father-son or master-servant.

About twenty years ago I gave a series of lectures in Fu-Ren Catholic University and taught in the Thomas Monastery for one semester. I told my students, who were mainly priests and nuns, to take refuge in the Buddha and to learn Buddhism well. There is absolutely no conflict between Buddhism and religion, for one is teacher-student and the other father-son. If the priests and nuns were to practice Buddhism and in turn abandon their own religion, I believe that even Buddha would not accept them, for it is against human ethics to discard the parent for the teacher. Therefore, religious followers will benefit if they practice

Buddhism. As we practice, we will attain the true wisdom to know exactly what Heaven is like and will be able to decide when and how we want to go there. Thus, Buddhism is a way of teaching as it teaches us how to regain our true wisdom.

When a monk is called "He-Shang," he is equivalent to the principal in today's school, for he is the director of educational strategies. All other faculty members are teachers who execute the principal's educational strategies and act as role models for the students' behavior and speech. My late teacher, Professor Fang constantly assured me that Buddhism is an education. Later in my studies of the sutras, I reaffirmed his statement that Buddhism is the pinnacle of the world's wisdom. It provides the greatest enjoyment for humankind. I have experienced the unsurpassable joy of being free from afflictions, delusions and wandering thoughts. My body and mind are clean and pure, totally at ease. I am the happiest person in the world. Therefore, I feel indebted to Professor Fang, for without him, I would not have learned Buddhism nor would I have such complete happiness derived from practicing Buddha's teaching.

Chapter 5: The Integration of Confucianism and Buddhism

Buddhism successfully merged into Chinese culture; they became inseparable. The basic concept that they share is to give up one's own interest for the sake of others. Confucianism and Buddhism advocate the enhancement and glorification of filial piety, the respect and devotion of an individual for their parents and teachers. Filial piety is a major element in accomplishing world peace.

What is education? It is the meaning and the value of human life, the relationships between human beings as well as those between humans and the universe. Confucian teaching

encompasses three main points. First, it is important to understand the relationship between humans, once this is understood we will learn to love people. Second, it is important to understand the relationship between humans and heaven, once this is understood we will learn to respect heavenly beings and spirits. Third, it is important to understand the relationship between humans and the environment, once this is understood we will learn to take care of the environment and to appreciate every single thing around us. There are four studies within Confucian teachings: virtue, speech, skills for earning a living and the arts. The teaching of virtue is the core of Confucianism; it is absolutely crucial, for without morality and proper conduct we become selfish and co ncerned only with ourselves at the expense of society. Such b ehavior can result in world chaos. Today, our education has lost that emphasis. Schools only teach skills that are superficial and not the root of education. When the root is rotten, it shakes the foundation of society and causes the chaos that we are experiencing today. Elementary schools are like the root of education: junior highs, high schools, and colleges are the flowers and leaves. Teachers can start teaching filial piety to our children as early as possible.

By looking at the way Chinese characters were created, we cannot but admire our ancestor's high level of wisdom. We thank them for having given us something that is so valuable and exquisite. The Chinese character "piety" embraces the spirit of Buddhism and the foundation of education as it is a combination of the characters for "old" and "son." Nowadays, people talk about the generation gap between parents and children, which is something traditional families did not have. In the Chinese tradition, not only are father and son one unit; grandfathers and grandsons, etc. are all part of the same continuum. This is a unique concept. Westerners often ask why Chinese people pay respect to ancestors since we barely know them. The

remembrance of our ancestors is the foundation of Confucianism and Buddhism, which is the source of harmony in society and peace in the world.

Today everyone longs for world peace, but we need to start from the foundation of filial piety to obtain it. Buddhism emphasizes unconditional compassion for all sentient beings in the universe and beyond; in the past, present and future. The continuum of time and space is inseparable from oneself, for **We Are All One Entity**. One does not find this extensive concept in religion. “Thus Come One”, one of the ten names for Buddha, stands for an enlightened being, which is our basic nature, and also the essence of the universe and human life. This concept is embodied by the Chinese character “piety” and the name of Amitabha Buddha in the Pure Land School. The names may be different but the meanings are the same: unconditional love for all beings that surpasses space and time.

The Five Human Relationships

Confucian teachings are based on five human relationships that are founded on moral principles. The five human relationships include those between husband/wife, parent/child, siblings, friends, and political leaders and the public. Husband/wife represents the smallest and the most intimate circle of human relationships. Outside the small circle is the extended family, which includes the relationships between father and son and those among the siblings. Outside the family there is society which includes additional relationships between the individual and his leader and circles of friends. We now often talk about the need to unite people. In ancient times, the Chinese had no use for the word “unite,” for the five human relationships define the union of all people. Everyone on this earth is our brother. Each is responsible for the other; parents being compassionate, sons and daughters being filial to their parents, siblings and friends being respectful to each other. In this way,

the country and its people are already a perfect union. The relationships between people also define responsibilities from one to the other. Everyone has his own duty and responsibility to fulfill.

The Practice of Confucianism and Buddhism

Human beings differ from animals by adhering to human relationships and basic moral principles. The practice of Confucianism is based on having sincere and proper thoughts, correct behavior, a well-organized family and country, and peace for all. This is identical to the views of Buddhism, which also emphasizes practicing and learning. It all starts from generating the Bodhicitta mind. "Bodhi" is a Sanskrit word meaning enlightenment. Enlightenment means an "awakened" mind. It is similar to the sincere thought and proper mind advocated by Confucianism. A Chinese government official defined sincerity very well. He noted that "Sincerity means having no single thought." There will be no sincerity as long as there are corrupted thoughts, wandering thoughts, or even the rise of a single thought. His definition is identical to that of Buddhism. The Sixth Patriarch Hui-Neng once said "...(the pure mind) contains nothing therefore collects no dust". However, people in general have a lot of wandering thoughts. How can one be rid of these wandering thoughts? The Confucian answer is "...to fight against uprising desires and achieve wisdom." This practice was stressed in the elementary school of the Confucian system. Buddha said, severing all desires is to stop all worries and troubles.

The Confucian Elementary School System

In the past, the Chinese elementary school students were well trained to guard against the uprising of desires. Schools emphasized training in student's concentration and wisdom. Students started school at the age of seven. They stayed with

their teachers and only went home during holidays. They were taught the correct way to interact with everyday life and the proper manner to attend to their teachers and elder schoolmates. This was called the education of moral principles based on human relationships. When the children went home, they would then treat their parents and siblings with filial piety and respect.

From the ages of seven to twelve, students were required to memorize and recite fluently the ancient texts. The teacher would first select materials which contained the profound wisdom of sages and saints and then encouraged the students to read and recite the material up to one or two hundred times a day. Children would have scattered thoughts if they were not assigned any tasks to do. The purpose of reciting was to focus their mind so that they would eventually obtain a pure mind, concentration and wisdom; even though, they may not have understood the meanings. However, the current educational system, in existence since the Revolution of 1911, eliminated this two thousand-year-old tradition and adopted the western educational system. This change, upon close examination, leads one to the root of modern China's social problems.

The Confucian Tai School System

At the age of thirteen, children were sent to Tai school, as there were no junior or high schools in ancient China. Tai school emphasized the analysis and discussion of the materials students had already memorized in elementary school. The teachers were experts in their fields and would concentrate on that field throughout their entire career. Each of them taught a small class with ten to twenty students and the lectures were not necessarily given in the classroom with textbooks. During that period, all the textbooks were printed in the universal format: twenty words per column and ten columns per page, with no space in between. The format was standard for the entire country regardless of the publisher. Both teacher and students memorized the textbooks so

well that they even knew exactly where the study materials were located. Since everything had been memorized earlier, there was no need for books after elementary school.

Teachers often took their students on field trips to broaden their knowledge and experience. As they traveled, knowledge was imparted to them along the way. Thus, the trips were without textbooks or restraints but accompanied with wine and food and filled with joy. The students would attend to the needs of the teacher. Therefore, as they concluded their travels to the many beautiful places, the course would close as well. For many, attending Tai school was the most joyful time of their lives.

In Taiwan, those who are in their eighties or nineties may have experienced this kind of education. My late teacher, Mr. Lee, then in his nineties, could still apply materials he had memorized in elementary school when writing articles; no reference materials were needed. This was the method he used to acquire the original wisdom that comes from the pure mind. With the pure mind, true wisdom arises. Having true wisdom is to know a person's past and future and also to understand the laws of cause and effect. One should not judge things by their appearance, but know and understand how events came about. The wisdom of knowing nothing emphasized in Buddhism is the original wisdom. Only when one has a pure mind, which contains nothing, will he also know everything when he is in contact with the external world. Therefore, the practicing and studying of Buddhism begins with eliminating all thoughts in order to obtain a pure mind.

All this made me think of our children, who are so pure, so innocent and uncontaminated in their thinking which is why it is best for our children to start learning Buddhism early in childhood. With little effort, children can truly and easily benefit from it. The experiences of a person with a pure mind are so different and profound that no ordinary person can truly appreciate them.

World Peace Can be Achieved if the Mind and Body are Well-trained, the Family is Well-run and the Country is Well-governed.

A true practitioner will keep himself from being greedy, angry, ignorant and arrogant toward others and his environment. If one has any of the elements just mentioned, then he is neither sincere nor proper. Sincerity and proper thoughts and viewpoints are the basis for training the mind. A person with a pure mind and body will not become ill. We suffer from illnesses because our minds are filled with wandering thoughts and worries that are derived from greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance.

As mentioned earlier, sincerity and proper thoughts and viewpoints are the basis for purifying one's mind. A purified mind leads to a purified body and naturally, a person will become immune from illness; thus, a realized practitioner would never get seriously ill. Moreover, if a person is determined to follow the path of Buddha, he or she will not die in the conventional manner. A conventional death means a person does not know exactly when they will leave this world, nor where they will go afterwards. On the other hand, true practitioners with confidence in themselves and in Amitabha Buddha, who cultivate in accordance with Buddhist teachings, will be capable of controlling both the time of leaving this world and of being born in the Western Pure Land. This is neither unusual nor a fairy tale, but the simple truth, and can be achieved by cultivating the pure mind and vowing to reach the Western Pure Land. Therefore, one needs to understand how important it is to be free of worries and attachments. Every Buddhist should maintain a pure mind and body at all times, treating everyone and everything with equality and composure. Only then would the family be in harmony, the society in unity and the world at peace. No longer would we have feuds, conflicts or wars. The peace and happ iness, which we all wish for today, would no

longer be a dream. World peace can be achieved if we combine Confucianism and Buddhism into our educational system.

The Eight Basic Confucian Moral Principles

Loyalty, filial piety, compassion, love, trust-worthiness, responsibility, peace and equality are the eight basic Confucian moral principles and are represented by four Bodhisattvas in Buddhism. Di Tsang Wang (Earth Store /Kristigharba) Bodhisattva represents filial piety and therefore the *Di Tsang Sutra* is known as the *Filial Piety Sutra*. This is because it teaches filial respect for both parents and teachers, who are both equally important in Buddhism and Confucianism. To treat one's parents with filial piety and to respect teachers are the innate virtues of human nature. The goal of Buddhist teaching is for us to realize the true nature of the mind, which can only be achieved by discovering its virtuous nature, without which one will never become enlightened.

Guan Yin Bodhisattva symbolizes compassion and represents kindness and love. Wen Shu Shi Li (Manjusri) Bodhisattva symbolizes wisdom and represents faith and loyalty. Pu Xian (Universal Worthy/Samantabhadra) Bodhisattva symbolizes great vows and putting the Buddha’s teaching into practice including filial piety, compassion and wisdom. He represents peace and equality. With compassion and wisdom, one can generate merits. To enjoy merits is to build upon the foundation of equality and purity - this is the greatest enjoyment for humankind. To cultivate merits in childhood, generate merits in middle age and enjoy merits in old age are described in Chinese as truth, virtue and beauty. One who enjoys merit in old age is called the complete person, which is similar to Buddha. We must understand that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not gods but the most perfect and happiest beings for us to learn from.

Wise ancestors in China long evoked these principles long ago before Buddhism was introduced there. Buddha

Shakyamuni, Confucius and Mencius never met, but they all had identical concepts and teaching methods. That was truly a coincidence and as is said in Chinese, "Heroes would have similar views" or said in the West, "Great minds think alike".

Chapter 6: The Buddha's Teachings are for Everyone

Recently a student came to me and asked how to practice Buddhism. The answer is the Four Universal Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas:

(1) Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to help them all;
(2) Afflictions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them all;
(3) Ways to practice are boundless, I vow to master them all;
(4) Enlightenment is unsurpassable; I vow to attain it.

To help others is to do our best in assisting them to break through delusion and become awakened, then they will be able to attain true happiness and leave suffering behind. In order to help all beings escape from suffering, one should be a good cultivator, excelling in moral and academic achievements. A cultivator can learn by upholding the precepts to guard against harmful consequences created by speech, body and mind, i.e. words, deeds and thoughts. Before comprehensive learning, however, it is necessary to cultivate good virtue by ending our afflictions including greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance, as they are the sources of all desires and delusions. True wisdom arises from cultivation of high moral character, from a pure, non-discriminatory and compassionate mind, and not from knowledge gained from books. Without a pure mind, the knowledge gained leads to deviated views. Therefore, the first priority in practicing Buddhism is to purify our mind and cut off

all attachments to erroneous ways. With the pure mind we can then reflect everything clearly and know all, thus attaining true wisdom and enlightenment.

Buddhism is for everyone, regardless of gender, age, occupation, nationality or religion. Everyone can learn and practice Buddhism, for it is the teaching of ultimate, perfect wisdom. There is a need for Buddha's teaching in all parts of the world. However, it is not easy to nurture Buddhist teachers. The difficulty lies with the fact that most people cannot renounce their worldly fame and wealth, which are the major obstacles in learning and practicing Buddhism. Without a pure mind, there is no way to truly understand Buddha's teachings and to realize the causes of all the problems in this world. Meanwhile, without virtue of merits and good causes and conditions, practitioners cannot find good teachers. Therefore, I always encourage young practitioners to resolve to save our country and the world.

Chapter 7: The Key to the Greatest Treasure

Recently, we have established a Pure Land Learning Center in the United States. The goal is to introduce the traditional Chinese culture to Westerners and to help them practice Buddhism. Our ancestors invented the most precious and timeless vehicle: a classical Chinese language, called Wen-Yen-Wen, in order to transmit the ancient culture to future generations and us. With this powerful vehicle, we can read the publications of Confucius or Mencius that were written twenty-five hundred years ago. B ecause our ancestors realized that language would be changing from time to time, they used this classical Chinese language to pass on their wisdom, thoughts, skills and experiences. It is not difficult to learn Wen-Yen-Wen. Mr. Lee, my teacher, has taught us the secret to reading the classical language; one only has to recite fluently fifty chapters

of ancient Chinese literature. In order to write in classical Chinese, one needs to memorize one hundred chapters. With this key, Wen-Yen-Wen, we can have access to and learn Buddhism and ancient Chinese wisdom, for the latest translations of the Buddhist sutras were in this classical language. Along with the pure, non-discriminating and compassionate mind, we can thus unlock our ultimate wisdom.

I have encouraged practitioners to read the *Infinite Life Sutra*, which is written in a simpler form of this classical Chinese language. The public should easily understand Eighty percent of its content. There are only forty-eight chapters in this compilation of the *Infinite Life Sutra*, which is close to the amount that Mr. Lee required us to memorize. This is a good way to start learning this classical Chinese language. After reading and memorizing this sutra, I believe there will be no more obstacles in reading other Buddhist sutras. I strongly urge not only practitioners but also Westerners who want to learn the Chinese culture and Buddhism to memorize fifty chapters of Wen-Yen-Wen or the *Infinite Life Sutra*. With two or three years of effort, one can obtain the key to explore the wonders of ancient Chinese wisdom and at the same time, transform the Buddhist sutras into one's own private treasure. Without this key, having all these collections of sutras and ancient Chinese literature would be futile, for there is no entry into the treasury.

Elementary School is the Foundation of Happiness

Ladies and gentlemen, parents and students, elementary school is the foundation for happiness in human life, the root of the country's future and the caretaker of the future society. You have made such contributions to this greatest task in human life and society. It is most meaningful and valuable for society to nurture capable and virtuous youth. I would like to extend my gratitude and highest respect to you. I wish all of you inner peace and happiness. May everyone have great health and prosperity!

"*Wherever the Buddha's teachings have flourished, either in cities or countrysides, people would gain inconceivable benefits. The land and people would be enveloped in peace. The sun and moon will shine clear and bright. Wind and rain would appear accordingly, and there will be no disasters. Nations would be prosperous and there would be no use for soldiers or weapons. People would abide by morality and accord with lows. They would be courteous and humble. Everyone would be content and there would be no injustice. There would be no thefts or violence. The strong would not dominate the weak and everyone would get their fair share.*"

The Sutra of Amitabha's Purity
Equality, and Understanding

DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the merit and virtues
accrued from this work
Adorn the Buddha's Pure Land,
Repaying the four kinds
of kindness above,
and relieving the sufferings of
those in the Three Paths below.

May those who see and hear of this,
All bring forth the heart of
Understanding,
And live the Teachings for
the rest of this life,
Then be born together in
The Land of Ultimate Bliss!

Homage to Amitabha Buddha!

VERSE FOR TRANSFERRING MERIT

I vow that this merit
will adorn the Buddha's Pure Land
repaying four kinds of kindness above
aiding those below in the three paths of suffering
may those who see and hear
all bring forth the bodhi heart
and when this retribution body is done
be born together in the land of ultimate bliss.

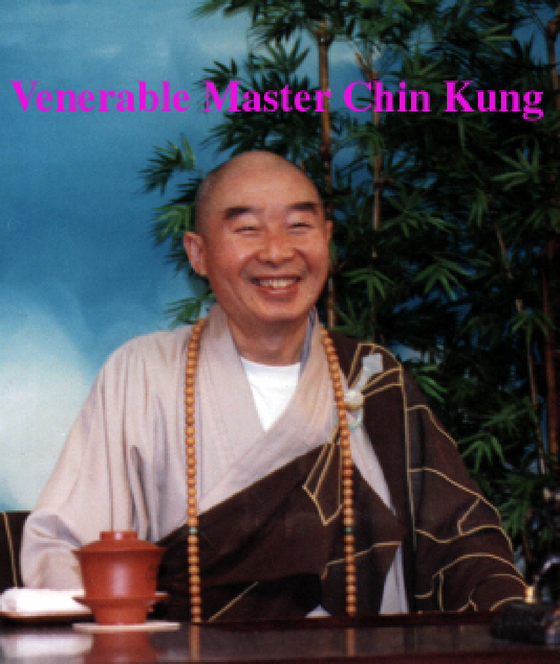
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